

LOST IN TRANSITION

SCHNEWS FAILS TO UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF CLIMATE GROUP

As global capitalism and its failing markets threaten to fall around our ears, it must be worth imagining what a different way of doing things might look like. And working towards it.

That's what the Transition Towns (TT) supporters want to do. TT's are a 'think global act local' strategy for fighting climate change first put forward by an permaculture academic, Rob Hopkins, in 2005/6 in Kinsale, Ireland. It was first exported to the UK in Totnes, Devon - and converts have been eagerly promoting the idea ever since.

And the message seems to be getting through. In the past couple of years the concept (and the leafleting) has been spreading around the country, nay, the world, with over a 100 communities signed up from all over the UK as well as Australia, New Zealand, Chile, the US and most recently, Japan.

The movement has also been hitting the headlines here in the UK recently, with just the other week a small town a few miles down the road from SchNEWS towers, Lewes, proudly launching it's own currency to much media fanfare.

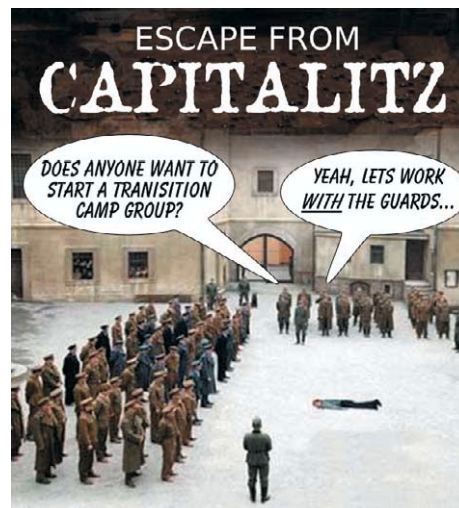
With such an emergent new force for social change, you'd think we might have mentioned it in SchNEWS before - it's obviously long overdue for us to put the boot in, er we mean, provide an unbiased and dispassionate rational analysis of the whole shebang.

So what's the big idea? Transition Towns (TT) make a good case for the need to

change. They recognise the pressing threats of climate change and peak oil (OK, well, the end of super-abundant cheap oil we can agree on, at least - see SchNEWS 644). This means that the globalised, air-mile, oil-driven nonsense needs to stop and more locally based, lower carbon living solutions are needed. The question is, how are we going to get there? But they are not calling for major reform or revolution - the clue is in the name, folks! - they are looking for an ordered gradual switch over - a transition. The way they propose this should come about is a somewhat tortuous affair, with the resultant danger that the eco-system or global economic system (or both) may collapse in the meantime.

To start the process of your whole town, or city, being designated a 'TT', all that is needed is a small group of well-meaning committed do-gooders, usually PR friendly middle-class types, to form a Transition Group. This group then works on publicising themselves, arranging film showings, printing leaflets and networking.

Once momentum has been sufficiently built, the group can then hold a great 'public unleashing' where the plan goes 'live'. As well as a wave of talks, trades and skills workshops and green-inspired local projects such as tree planting and small permaculture schemes, the main plank of the plan involves gradually formulating a 'Local Energy Descent Plan' (LEDP), to map out how the local community might one day become more self sufficient,



less oil dependant and much greener. If enough local businesses, people and councillors go along with it, or palatable parts of it, the town can officially adopt the mantle of a 'Transition Town' and brand itself accordingly.

Measures suggested include the laudable aims of reducing the reliance on multinational corporations for food and goods production, improving energy use and efficiency, increasing recycling, reducing car dependency and a host of other lefty-green objectives. It's a 'big tent' which allows it to scoop up the efforts of a range of social change groups under one large banner.

So what's the problem? Whilst it's hard to be too disparaging - these are all people with the best intentions, attempting to actually take some sort of action as opposed to sitting idly by and waiting for the big collapse - and some change for the good is obviously better than none, there are some flaws in the thinking.

Firstly, TT acknowledge that they have no desire to do away with all the trappings of capitalist society - merely reduce local dependence on it, gradually. They avoid taking on the political roots of all the problems and concentrate on symptoms. A key aim is to get the local council on board. Which many have been surprisingly willing to do...up to a point. Local government itself is charged by central government with working out how to roll out various greenish initiatives, such as to minimise energy needs and increase recycling levels for example, and the LEDP overlaps to some degree with many of their own blueprints for the future - as long as it's controlled and the results leave the status quo as little changed as possible, with power flowing upwards, private money still in charge of all those recycling facilities and a capitalistic model still underpinning the local economy.

Continued overleaf...

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For farting (and failing a breath test)...

One drunk driving American in West Virginia got his charges bumped up this week by letting rip on Police officers when they tried to fingerprint him.

"The gas was very odorous and created contact of an insulting or provoking nature with Patrolman Parsons," claim the cops and have done him not just for drink driving, but assaulting a police officer and obstruction. They were obviously having a bad air day.

GRAND DAY OUT

It was quids in for animal rights protesters this week, as they finally got justice after being detained by Kent Police in 2006 on their way to a demo against live exports. In echoes of the Fairford coach detention case (see SchNEWS 565), around 40 protesters have been offered £1,250 each after being detained on board their coach and refused the right to demonstrate at Dover docks.

As one of the lucky winners told SchNews: "It was crazy, we were travelling down to a national demo, which had been organised in advance with the police. It was just after live exports had resumed following the foot-and-mouth epidemic. There were around forty of us in a coach from London. We were pulled over as soon as we got into Dover and given a police motorbike escort to Western Marina.

"When we got there we all tried to pile off the coach - but there were loads of them waiting for us. They were herding us around, pushing people over and eventually they

forced us all back onto the coach and began walking up and down filming everybody. They then told us we only had half an hour to demonstrate in Dover. Even that right was taken away almost immediately as they forced the coach to return to London with a police escort. It was one of the hottest days of the year and they didn't let anyone off the coach for a drink or to use the toilet. There were kids and elderly people with us. It was disgraceful, but to be honest, it's what animal rights activists expect from the police."

A small victory, but no doubt not enough to stop the ceaseless police harassment of animal rights campaigners (See any forthcoming SchNEWS...)

Currently UK exports of cattle have been suspended following yet another outbreak of bovine T.B but exports of sheep are continuing. For more info see www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~kale

So the council can now use the TT brand wagon to increase uptake of these plans on a wave of public enthusiasm, whilst simultaneously seeming uber green and championing the local over the national. Put this way, its easy to see why many a town hall bigwig are talking up the scheme.

Which explains why Lewes council are so behind the latest big venture in the TT vision of the future – launching local currencies. As people previously used to get hanged for such impertinence as starting yer own money, there must be a catch. And there is.

The Lewes Pound (LP) was unveiled last week with a windfall of media coverage. As global financial markets have been taking a beating, perhaps this was a model for the brave new world? Er, not really. Because it isn't actually a currency at all. It's actually an ingenious scheme using existing book token legislation. It involves effectively buying a certain amount of sterling (in Lewes' case, £10,000) and then issuing vouchers to the equivalent value, accepted in local shops signing up the scheme.

Which many local shops in Lewes were of course only too happy to do – a welcome free boost to trade as consumers voluntarily pledge to spend their cash with them. Who wouldn't?

The idea is that the LP will increase interest in spending more cash locally, which in theory keeps more of the profit generated circulating locally, as opposed to being syphoned out of the community and into the pockets of global institutions (like Tesco, for example) and their shareholders.

Which is great, surely. Well yes, except that the vouchers are redeemable back into cash any time you, or a business-owner wishes - presumably for going shopping at Tesco or making more import deals with third-world tat suppliers.

And one of the stated aims of the year long test project is to get national chains accepting them – which seems a rather strange measure of success and contradicts the whole stated purpose.

Money already spent in local shops will continue circulating with little effect on the outside world. While OK for PR and raising public

awareness of the exploitation by global corporations, it's not achieving more than affecting a few better-off people's spending habits.

In any event, in Lewes, the big launch has not really gone as planned. Whilst there was massive interest and local flag-waving parochial support for the LP, the well-meaning urging of the TT organisers to keep circulating the vouchers and not change them back into cash has not exactly been heeded.

All the LP notes 'sold out' in hours... only to be hoarded and swiftly offered on Ebay for up to £40 for one Lewes Pound as the local populace immediately capitalised on the opportunity to indulge in some rampant currency speculation!

They reasoned that as there is a limited supply of individually numbered LP's, they will in the future be highly collectable - and there have been no shortage of over-the-odds buyers, leaving the whole scheme looking somewhat farcical.

The TT group – having considered but eventually rejected the idea of selling LPs itself for £10 each in order to lesson the black marketeering, have now pledged to print up some more stock - although whether they'll ever be able to afford to devalue the LP enough to out-bankroll the speculators remains to be seen!

As does the overall effect of the Transition Towns movement itself. Whilst we broadly support many of its stated objectives, we cannot see how failing to plan for the much more radical reform of society needs will really work. Attempting to push the existing power structures into implementing some of the required measures will only ever lead to partial change and speaks mainly to people who want things more or less as they are, only slightly greener.

...But we could be wrong! To judge for yourself (and don't let us put you off working for more localisation and all things green!) see www.transitiontowns.org

* The Trapesse collective's in depth critique of the Transition Movement is available at www.sparrow.cubecinema.com/stuffit/trapesse

Protesters camped out in the trees in Titmore Woods are appealing for equipment to see them through the rest of the year. Polyprop rope (8mm/10mm) is needed for creaky walkways between trees, as are axes, hammers and tools in general. Tinned foods are also on the wishlist.

The camp was started in May 2006 as dodgy developers Heron/Persimmon/Taylor Wimpey and supermarket giant Tesco announced plans to cut down 275 trees to make way for a new bigger supermarket and 850 homes (despite an existing Tesco and over 1,000 empty properties in nearby Worthing). While the campaign has had some success, forcing the council to redraw the plans and saving 200 trees from destruction (see SchNEWS 562) - the new plans still involve a new housing and utility building complex.

On Sunday (Sept 28th) from 2pm there will be a free caff at the camp where you can walk round the beautiful surrounds – Titmore Woods is one of two woods left on the Sussex coastal plain with oaks beech and ash and a willow lined lake – and chat to campers over a free cuppa and cake.

If you can't make it up there to drop off supplies or visit the caff (each Sunday at the end of the month) then you can help in other ways. A new planning application has been submitted by the developers - to see the new plans and put in a letter of objection (before Oct 9th) go to www.protectourwoodland.co.uk.

* Plus come along for a vegan Sunday roast at the Cowley Club on London Rd on October 12th from 2-6pm - all cash raised will be going direct to the camp. Eat for victory!

OVER THE YARD ARM

October 11th is "Freedom Not Fear 2008", an international day of action against surveillance, both government and business. With demos across Europe, in Britain there will be a protest outside New Scotland Yard, Broadway, London, SW1H 0BG, from 1pm. This is just outside the SOCPA zone around Parliament. Bring stuff to make a noise!

* www.freedom-not-fear.eu

...and finally...

Credit crunch or not – banks have lent £400,000 to one Spanish activist who then promptly passed the loot on to various campaigning groups. "What could be better than robbing the ones who rob us and distributing the money among the groups which are denouncing this situation and building alternatives?" asked Enric Dura, acting under the pseudonym, Robin Hood. Enric persuaded a total of 39 banks to lend his fake TV production company cash, even soliciting the help of a government agency to broker a loan on one occasion.

The outlaw then promptly published details of his blag in 200,000 'how to do it' newsletters distributed by his mates in and around Barcelona. Bankers were none too pleased. "It is not permissible for someone to laugh at the system like this," commented one, Jordi Mestre, director general of the Caixa Sabadell savings bank. Except it is - so far the police have not received a single request from any of the embarrassed banks to track Enric down. He is believed to have fled the country – for Sherwood Forest no doubt – and presumably used a 'Mr R. Hood' credit card to buy his ticket!

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - we can't afford a transit vanguard.Honest!

WHO LOVES YER, BABI

On 20th September at 3.15pm, gay radical artist Babi Badalov was deported on a BMI flight to Azerbaijan.

Babi sought asylum in the UK in 2006 following years of persecution because of his sexuality. His own family had threatened to kill him – one attack left him with only eight teeth.

His art and poetry, which mocked Azerbaijan's ruling elite, got him targeted for repression. Most famous was a photographic piece, parodying the abundance of public statues of the Azerbaijani president. This led to threatening visits from the Ministry of National Security (MNS), Azerbaijan's version of the KGB.

After arriving in the UK, Babi was dispersed to Cardiff and quickly immersed himself in activism. He regularly helped out Cardiff's social centre P.A.D and despite his precarious immigration status was in the thick of campaigning and active member of No Borders South Wales.

Babi was snatched on Tuesday attending his weekly signing at the UK Border Agency building in Cardiff. Informed that he was going to be detained and deported Babi said, "I feel sick". The UK Border agent told him, "Well you make us sick, you're going back where you belong". Under cover of darkness he was taken to Campsfield detention centre.

He was able to send this message: "PlizPLIZpliz i wontWONTwont GO back. i WANT die HERE THAN AZERBAIJAN. HELL O FAKING 21st

Century! Can I stay in UK? Can I live 5 year happy here? FAK THE LAW MAKER! humanity"

Whilst in detention Babi was given a medical exam – the subsequent report strongly recommended he be given a proper psychiatric evaluation.

Babi was due to be deported at 8pm on Saturday the 20th on a flight to Baku. However, following a huge amount of harassment from friends and supporters from around the country, Azerbaijan Airlines caved in and refused to carry him. But the Home Office rescheduled his deportation to a British Midland Airways (BMI) flight at 3.15pm the same day. This time despite a huge struggle, which continued up until the last minute - Babi was eventually deported.

Friend and No Borders South Wales activist, Noah Moore told SchNEWS:

"While Babi is currently safe, if anything happens to him the state and BMI will have blood on their hands. His deportation has left a huge hole in all his friends lives and demonstrates the brutality of immigration controls. He was ripped away from his new home, friends and people that loved him just so the government can keep its deportation statistics up. We didn't fight to keep Babi here out of compassion or because he had suffered. We don't care why Babi came. We fought for Babi because but he was one of us, a fighter for freedom of movement, for equality and a world without borders."

* See www.noborderswales.wordpress.com/fest

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